DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 050 451 EA 003 444

AUTHOR Willis, Benjamin C.
TITLE Administrative Reaction to Student Disruption.
PUB DATE 23 Feb 71
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at American Association of School Administrators Annual Convention. (103rd, Atlantic City, New Jersey, February 20-24, 1971)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Activism, *Administrative Personnel, *Administrator Responsibility, Simulation, Speeches, *Student Alienation, *Student Participation

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses appropriate preventive measures for and proper reaction to student disruptions. While admitting that there is no hard and fast solution, the author cautions against overreacting to disruptions and encourages a positive approach in using student involvement to improve the educational effort. The report emphasizes that an administrator should listen to and become involved with students in an ongoing interchange of ideas on procedures and policies. The author also recommends the simulation of school disruption as a technique for planning the course of action necessary for a particular situation. (JF)

ED050451

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Administrative Reaction to Student Disruption

Presented by: Dr. Benjamin C. Willis, Superintendent
Broward County Schools
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

To: American Association of School Administrators
at Atlantic City, New Jersey
on February 23, 1971

I am most tempted to start out in the strictly academic fashion by spending a disproportionate amount of time in defining the problem, but I feel that it's very much like the man standing in the middle of a swimming pool saying, "I'm wet." It occurs to me that the problem is here and that precise definition is not, at this particular time, necessary for the discussion that we would have today. Certainly at other times, in other places, and other more detailed considerations when periods, commas, the's and a's make a difference, this might well be appropriate.

Let us very quickly decide, then, that a school disruption is any activity or event which interrupts the education of students. With this as a definition, I am not at all sure that some teaching doesn't become a school disruption.

Barring some teaching as a consideration today, let's turn our attention to the student boycott, student walkouts, property damage, arson and vandalism, riot fighting, physical confrontations, and such, as being our concern here.

These phrases are certainly not the ones that we would propose as being indications of consent nor can we, or they, in any manner justify these actions as anything except message of discontent.

EA 003 444

Somewhere in these acts I see a reflection of the Boston Tea Party and some upstart who crossed the Delaware and disrupted a Christmas Party the British were giving. So it occurs to me that when we, as educators, look at the man-models in our curriculum such as Freud, Dewey, Russeau, Jefferson and Lincoln, could we expect anything but that the young generation now, and to come, would involve themselves in issues that concern them, and have the courage of their convictions. It is also interesting to note that all of these man-models were disruptive each in his own way.

I would propose to you then today, in the vernacular of today, to "cool it," don't over-react; cool the rhetoric, but think positively about how student involvement could be used to improve the educational effort. My first suggestion would be to involve the students, and to become involved with students - you in the things that they do, and they in the things that you do. Certainly, providing more and better opportunities for student involvement and participation is not only desirable as a means of avoiding student conflict but can, in many cases, lead to a better school program. I can recommend that you could have informal discussions at lunches, at breakfasts, at other school meetings with the students. Very recently, at the Curriculum Council meeting in Broward County, a group of high school seniors talked to the entire committee about their impression of the school system.

Our young people have evolved their own views on life, their own music, their own fashion, and they exert a significant influence on our society. At the same time, it is as wrong to label all young people as part of the culture as it is to label all of that culture wrong. It is a serious error to believe that all of our young people fit the same mold, even those whose hair and dress are long or short. I believe there is probably as great a

variation in beliefs and values in this generation as there was in mine.

My next suggestion would be to listen, listen. In my dealings with students I listen to them and do my best to understand their views on whatever they think is important but I want them to listen to me too, and to consider my responsibilities. I will not play games with them and I do not want them to play games with me. I will consistently attempt to give them a full measure of respect and to express faith on their integrity and judgment, even when we disagree.

In the June 1970 issue of the Phi Delta Kappa, Dr. Richard Gorton has some six recommendations which he proposes that schools should consider in devising ways to channel student activity into a productive, rather than a destructive, form. Dr. Gorton says:

1. High priority should be given by the school to insure that its rules and regulations, curriculum and teaching methods are based on an educational rationale which is tenable and which can be endorsed by other members of the educational community and by the public at large. I can almost feel the freshness of the ideas at an informal, on the floor, shirt-tails-out type of student-teacher rap session, directed at considering what is tenable and what is not tenable.
2. The schools should initiate their own programs for student involvement. Revitalizing the student government may be in some cases the answer, but it would seem to me the repainting of an old house. Is it time to consider that possibly seniors have a place in the teaching process? Is it time to consider peer teaching? Is it time to consider that students are an excellent judge of the value of instruction. It is certainly time to consider, with imagination and vision, some innovative and effective ways to involve students in those activities having to

do with the educational system.

3. Keep the channels of communications open and well publicized. Frequently students are not aware of the interest the majority of administrators and teachers have in the welfare and the concerns of the students.

4. Evaluate proposals, recommendations, or demands in light of a larger educational philosophy or framework. Frequently the student's perspective of his request is strictly from a personal point of view, and needs to be evaluated in terms of the total educational picture. It needs to be emphasized that the achievement of some goals in the educational process may involve sacrifice of student's personal wishes or needs.

5. Establish a district-wide policy on student dissent which includes a grievance procedure. The concept of a student grievance procedure is probably foreign to most of us but Dr. Gorton mentions that the Evanston Township High School District has such a policy.

6. Schools should provide specific courses on the changing of institutions, assistance in evaluating different methods of achieving reform, and reinforcement for examples of constructive and disruption-free student approaches to change. One of the greatest challenges in education today is to demonstrate to the young people that non-disruptive methods of dissent can be viable and effective.

We, as educators, have a responsibility to develop the techniques of the seminar, or discussion groups, centered around the problems and interests of major concerns facing youth and their tomorrow. Moreover, it seems that procedures should be developed for allowing youth to control more of their physical lives. The Student Council should be, not just a repainted old building, but rather an upgraded, functioning body that truly represents

various student concerns, and truly has the power of enforcement of student-developed rules.

It should be evident, at this point, that the educator of today must be viable in order to be effective. Todays principal knows that the old style Napoleon, sitting back in his office making judgment and disciplining both student and staff is obsolete. Dr. Steve Bailey, in his publication entitled, "Disruption in Urban Public Secondary Schools" has the following suggestions for the new breed of principals regarding school disruption. He says that disruptive events are rarely carefully planned or programmed. Disruption is triggered often by the smallest, apparently insignificant, occurrence. Todays principal should work very hard in the preventative aspect of disruption, but should one come, he must have made careful preparations for reacting to it. Dr. Bailey further suggests that, above all, maintain a professional bearing throughout a disruptive event, for if the group senses that the prime authority figure - you - is rattled, that he has lost his cool, the group will, undoubtedly, increase its successful disturbance.

Up to this point we have been talking about the ounce of prevention. Now let's talk about a pound of reaction. Just what do you do? What kind of plans can you make? What kind of plans should you make in the event that all of the precautionary measures have still resulted in a disruption. The often used cliche of "there are no two situations exactly alike," would certainly seem to apply in the trying to arrive at an over-all plan for dealing with school disruption. There are some general things that, of course, should be included in such a plan, but first let me suggest that since we are talking about individual schools, individual school districts, that you

consider the possibility of using the technique of what if ..., then I will..., or then we should... In other words, I suggest an exercise in simulation of possibilities for you and selected members of your staff, in order for you to better specify and better plan for the types of things that may well disrupt your particular situation. A disruptive force in a one room schoolhouse would be considerably different, and the simulation would be considerably different, than if it were in a multi-room, multi-level building.

For the moment let's assume that it has happened, and see if we can ask some questions, the answers to which should be included in the battle plan for dealing with school disruption. First, who do you notify; the principal, the superintendent, the police, the teachers, all the students over the intercom - who do you notify? In actually dealing with the disruptive event are there faculty members who can talk to the dissidents? Are there student leaders who could perform the same function as well, or better? When should the police become involved? What possibilities are there for containment of the disruption in a small area of the school? In talking to the dissidents do you use threat of police action as a lever for disbandonment? Do you request that the students leave? Do you request the parents of selected students to come and remove their students from the premises? Should you talk immediately with leaders of the disruption? Is it possible that in "keeping your cool" the demonstration could continue and still not interfere with the operation of the school? It is wise to propose some protective action as regards people, property, and records. What plans should be made for the use of faculty in the plan? Whatever your plan, be advised that the means used and the attitudes reflected by administrators to quell a disorder may have a greater lasting effect on the school and community than the rather limited end of quelling it.

After the battle, how are the students who participated to be dealt with? Are they to be suspended? Are they to be publicly prosecuted? Are teachers and administrators expected to identify disorderly students? Can pictures taken during disorders be used to identify participants? Should there be policies stating that mass punishment will not be made?

In summarizing my remarks I do not want to leave the impression that there is a solution. It may well be the very case in which John F. Kennedy suggested that just because there is a problem doesn't mean that there is a solution. However, I have attempted to emphasize the positive-to accentuate the positive, if you will. I have further suggested that coolness is the order of the day. That you should listen, and listen, and become involved with students and they with you in an ongoing interchange of ideas on procedures and policies. Finally, I would recommend the simulation of school disruption as a technique for planning the course of action which you feel would be necessary for your particular situation.